

Immigrants bypassing Chicago for other cities

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Greg Hinz on
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Metro Chicago's century-old position as a top destination for international immigration has eroded, with the Windy City no longer even close to New York or Los Angeles in terms of attracting people moving to the U.S. from a different country.

According to [a new report by the Brookings Institution](#), Chicago in the decades of the 1990s and 2000s ranked fourth in terms of movement from abroad, just as it had for many years before, trailing only those two big coastal cities but also fast-changing Miami. But in this decade, Chicago's position ranks eighth, according to the Washington think tank, lagging not only those three cities but also the Washington, Houston, Boston and San Francisco and not much ahead of Dallas or Philadelphia.

The smallish gain of an estimated 148,000 in the 2010-2016 period was barely a sixth of New York's 819,000 and a third of LA's 316,000. Equally important, the 148,000 comes nowhere close to covering the region's loss of 419,000 people to other cities in domestic migration. That's a prime reason why, even after more births than deaths here, metro Chicago overall has grown little this decade and [lately has been declining](#).

The Brookings report is quite consistent with other recent research by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, which found that even as the share of the region's population born abroad [has steadily increased since 1990](#), the rate of increase relative to NY, LA, Boston and Philadelphia [has plummeted](#) since the recession hit.

"We generally lose residents domestically, which is common for many older, urbanized regions. However, our international immigration rate declined during the recession and has not yet recovered," says Liz Schuh, the

principal researcher at CMAP. "Other peers have experienced more resurgence than the Chicago region."

Why? Part of it likely is economic, says Chicago demographer Rob Paral. "Immigrants probably are responding to stronger job creation in other regions." But more immigrants are bypassing traditional portal cities and heading directly to mid-sized communities elsewhere, he adds.

Schuh attributes part of to a change in the origin of immigrants.

"Historically, immigrants from South and Central America, particularly Mexico, were the largest immigrant group coming to the region," she notes. "Post recession, growth in this group is flat. Instead, immigrants from Asia are now our fastest growing group."

Indeed, immigration is down from the south to Chicago, which always was known as a good haven for the undocumented. But there has also been a dropoff among Poles, who, with the rise of the European common market, "can get a job in London" instead of moving here.

Paral cites other data that, just in the city of Chicago, the number of Polish-born residents dropped from 69,500 in 2000 to just under 40,000 now.

All of this predates President Donald Trump and his vow to limit immigration, as well as the feud between the White House and Mayor Rahm Emanuel over the Chicago chief's promise to stand up for immigrants. Just yesterday, [Attorney General Jeff Sessions lashed out at Emanuel](#) over the city's new lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's plans to crack down on so-called sanctuary cities.

Chicago was built by immigrants. And now there are less of them.